



Healthcare & Groceries in Chicago: KEY FINDINGS

How are access to healthcare and access to groceries distributed across the city of Chicago? Is there a connection to zoning?

Urban Institute researcher Lydia Lo examined the distribution of healthcare locations in Chicago—sites like primary care clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies—and found that they tend to be distributed unevenly across the city. Lo also examined the distribution of grocery stores, looking at data on a variety of food store types from convenience stores to supermarkets.

Grocery access, too, is inequitably distributed, with communities on the North side seeing more stores with healthy food options. However, in our analyses **zoning does not appear to be responsible for these disparities—other factors like wealth, census tract demographics, and health insurance access seem to be more related.**

Key data takeaways from our research

HEALTHCARE TAKEAWAYS



➤ **The wealthiest and most diverse tracts tend to have the best access to primary care**, as measured by city-identified primary care clinic locations and self-reported access to doctors. Except for the wealthiest and most diverse tracts, most tracts in Chicago have below the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended density of at least 1 physician practice per 1,000 residents. In 2021, just 20% of Chicago's population lived in a tract with the WHO-recommended physician density. We also found stark gaps in access to pharmacies and the share of residents with private insurance, with both much more likely on the North side.

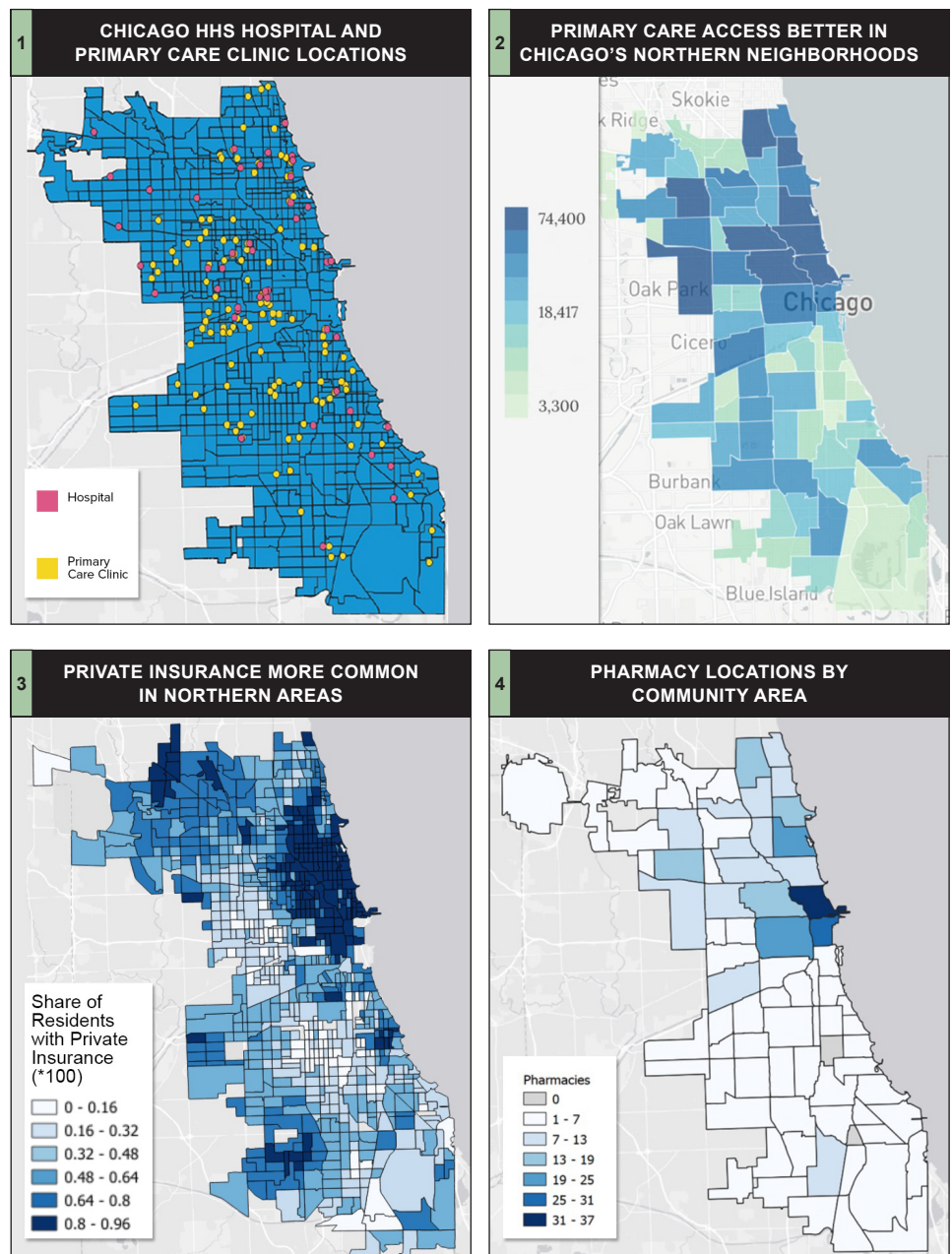
Sources:

Figure 1: [Chicago HHS Primary Care Clinic Locations](#) and [Cook County Hospital Locations](#)

Figure 2: [Chicago Health Atlas: Primary Care Access](#)

Figure 3: Census ACS

Figure 4: Compiled Chicago Business License, HHS open list, and OpenStreet Facilities Pharmacy designations 2025



continued ➤

GROCERIES TAKEAWAYS

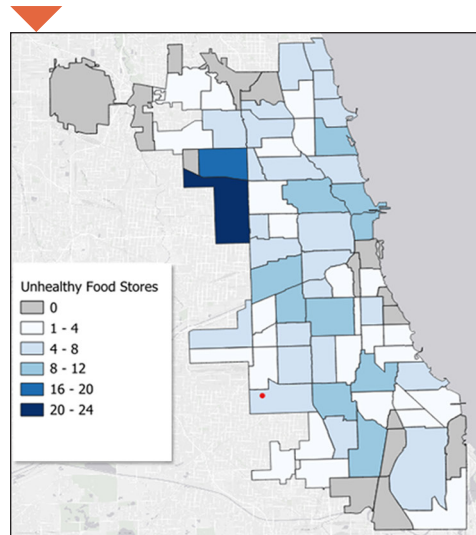


Residents on the North side have greater access to healthy food options.

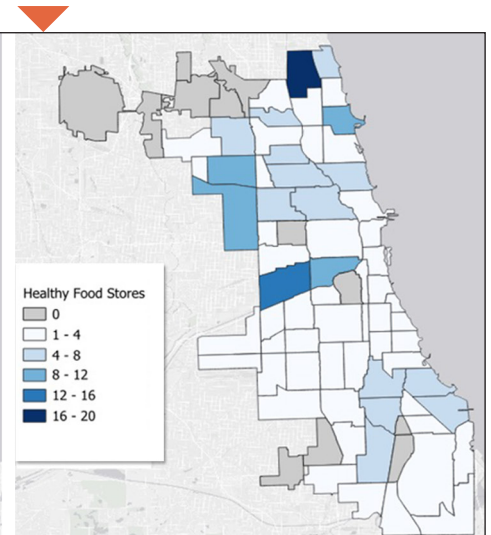
While all census tracts have at least one food store in USDA's SNAP food vendor database, the North side and parts of the West side are more likely to have food stores likely to provide healthier food options (grocery stores, supermarkets, superstores, etc.) in addition to food stores likely to have less healthy food (convenience stores, drug stores, and dollar stores). Poor grocery access for low-income households is strongly correlated with tract racial demographics, especially segregated Black communities.

Food stores overall are most likely to be located in areas zoned B3. At the same time, the larger food store types—superstores and supermarkets—are most often located within Planned Developments.

LESS HEALTHY
Convenience stores, drug stores, dollar stores



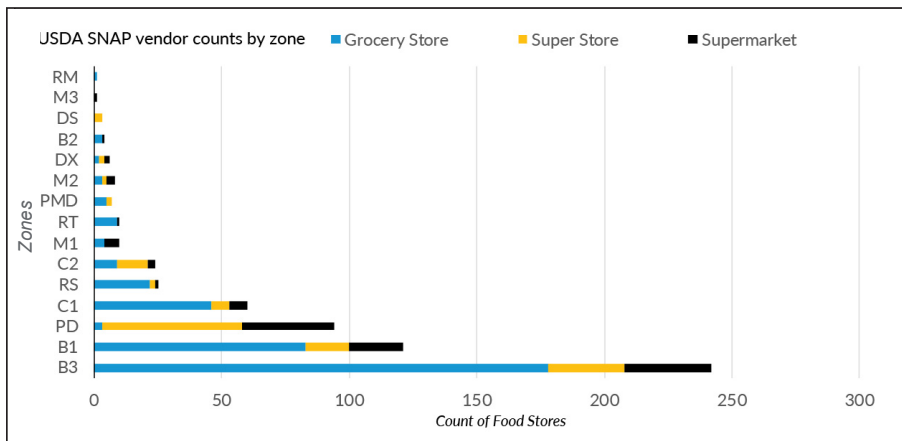
MORE HEALTHY
Grocery stores, supermarkets, super stores, farmer's markets, restaurant food centers



Data: USDA SNAP Food Vendors 2025

HEALTHCARE & GROCERIES TAKEAWAY

Chicago's zoning ordinance widely allow both medical uses and grocery stores in business-oriented zoning districts, but do not explicitly incentivize these types of development. Medical services is a permitted use in all B and C zones, and all D zones except DR. Food and beverage retail sales is a permitted use in all B and C zones. Other cities use various strategies to incentivize grocery stores in overlay districts (e.g., Tulsa, OK); offer density bonuses to developments that include grocery stores (e.g. Carteret County, NC); or explicitly encourage healthy grocery access (e.g. Madison, WI).



Source: 2025 USDA SNAP Vendors (grocery stores, supermarkets, and super stores) and 2023 Chicago zoning data. Note: This excludes specialty stores, pharmacies, corner stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets

Why does this data matter? Why should I care about these findings?

This research matters **because ensuring access to healthcare and grocery options is critical if we want everyone in our city to thrive**. Better grocery access [leads to healthier eating habits and reduces chronic disease risk](#). And evidence suggests that [proximity to healthcare providers has real impacts on health outcomes](#) (like survival rate and length of hospital stay). Our findings show that whether or not you have a doctor in your neighborhood, and whether or not you can walk down the street to a supermarket, differ widely across neighborhoods in our city. **Though zoning itself may not have caused these problems, there may be an opportunity to use zoning policies or other incentives to encourage the siting of groceries and healthcare in places that lack these key amenities.**

Zoning and Land Use Assessment initiative and research

This research is part of a collaborative initiative led by Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) and the Urban Institute that evaluates Chicago's zoning and land use to understand whether they contribute to equitable, sustainable, and healthy outcomes for communities and residents. The goal is to understand zoning's impact to collectively make changes to create a vibrant and thriving Chicago.

For more information about this project and additional information about this research visit metroplanning.org/projects/zoning-land-use-assessment